DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 147 663 CG 011 966

AUTHOR Burke, Ronald J.; Weir, Tamara
TITLE Working Men as Fathers of Adolescents.
SPONS AGENCY Imperial Oil Co. Ltd., Toronto (Ontario).
PUB DATE [76]
NOTE 20p.; For related documents, see CG 011 964, CG 011 965, CG 011 967, CG 011 968

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); *Adolescents; Behavioral Science Research; *Family Relationship; *Fathers; *Helping Relationship; Individual Needs; *Parent Child Relationship; Parent Role; Psychological Patterns; *Role Perception

ABSTRACT

This study examines how 273 adolescents view the help provided to them by their mothers, their fathers and their peers. The assumption was that the parent-child relationship, in particular, would contain many of the ingredients (proximity, affection, responsibility, shared experiences) which should foster the development of helping relationships between mothers and fathers and their adolescents. Special interest was placed on the fathers' role, since men in this culture are socialized to be providers and breadwinners and are not as likely to be prepared for emotional-supportive roles as women. The data provide some interesting observations on ways adolescents perceived their fathers serving as helpers, and indicate that working men with families may be having difficulties in switching from the demands of work roles to the demands of father roles. (Author/BP)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R. Burke
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED147663

WORKING MEN AS FATHERS OF ADOLESCENTS[1]

Ronald J. Burke and Tamara Weir

York University
Downsview, Ontario

Over the past two years we have been involved in a programme of research on informal helping relationships - social support processes which frequently occur in the course of pursuing relationships with others. For our purposes we have defined informal helping as the occasion when one individual becomes involved in assisting another to deal and cope with problems and tensions which arise for him/her in day-to-day living.

In the initial stages of our research, we anticipated that informal helping would be more prevalent in social settings where people were in close contact with one another and had repeated opportunities for interaction. For this reason, we elected to examine relationships formed in the family and work settings. We were primarily interested in determining whether informal helping did exist in these situations and if they did, their characteristics and potential benefits to parties involved.

An earlier paper (Burke & Weir, 1975) reported some of our findings on husband-wife helping relationships as revealed in 189 married couples. Our data indicated that husbands and wives frequently used one another as sources of help when facing difficulties or feeling under stress. In addition, those husbands and wives who reported greater satisfaction with the help provided by their spouse were also more likely to report greater life and job satisfaction and better physical and psychological health.

Other studies concerned with informal helping in work settings have focused on such aspects as: the characteristics of the individuals selected as helpers (Burke and Weir, 1975b); descriptions of actual helping episodes by people in helper and

CG011966

helpee roles (Burke, Weir and Duncan, 1976); characteristics of individuals identified as effective, ineffective and non-helpers (Burke and Weir, 1976) and the influence of different organizational climates on the helping activity (Burke and Weir, 1976).

The present investigation returns to the nuclear family and the community and examines how 273 adolescents view the help provided to them by their mothers, their fathers and their peers. Our belief was that the parent-child relationship, in particular, would contain many of the ingredients (proximity, affection, responsibility, shared experiences) which should foster the development of helping relationships between mothers and fathers and their adolescents. We were especially curious about the role fathers played in this regard, given that men in our culture are socialized to be providers and breadwinners and not as likely to be prepared for emotional-supportive roles. Our data provided some interesting observations on ways adolescents perceived their fathers serving as helpers, and indicated that working men with families may be having difficulties in switching from the demands of work roles to the demands of father roles.

Setting of the Research

The data were collected from 273 male and female adolescents ranging in age from 13 to 20. All the adolescents were in co-educational high schools, in grades 9 through 13. Three schools in or around Metropolitan Toronto were selected to maximize the diversity of the families studied. Thus, one school represented the downtown core area, a second, an older suburban area, and a third a new suburban area. The hope for diversity was realized in that (1)

family incomes ranged from less than $5,000 per year to over $35,000 per year; education of parents ranged from less than Grade 8 to completed Ph.D.'s, and ages of parents ranged from under 35 to over 60 years of age.

A number of School officials and teachers were approached and asked if they would allow their students to participate in the study. All schools we contacted agreed to cooperate, and particular classes were made available to us during the regular school day. Student participation was voluntary and those who volunteered were asked to complete a detailed questionnaire during the alloted time periods.

The questionnaire collected information in four areas: (1) demographic information about adolescents and their parents (2) sources and intensity of stress experienced by the adolescents in their day-to-day living, (3) adolescents' satisfaction with several aspects of their life situation, and their mental and physical well-being, and (4) quality of the helping relationship the adolescents experienced with their mothers, fathers, and peers. In this paper we will be focusing primarily on the data relating to fathers as helpers.

Results of the Study.

Adolescents were asked to indicate (1) how likely they were to disclose their problems and tensions to their mothers, their fathers, and their peers, (2) how satisfied they were with the help provided to them from each of these sources. These data are presented in Table 1. Adolescents were significantly more likely to inform their peers when they were in distress than they were to inform their mothers, and significantly more likely to inform their

mothers than they were to inform their fathers. The satisfaction data indicated the same relative positions of the three helpers, however, only the difference between satisfaction with help obtained from peers and that obtained from fathers was significantly different.

Enter Table 1 about here

The adolescents were also asked to indicate how free they felt to go to each of the three helpers for help with twelve specific kinds of problems. These data are indicated in Table 2. The percentages indicate adolescents who felt free to discuss a particular problem with a given helper. In summary, adolescents felt freer to go to peers for help on 9 of the 12 problems (exceptions being family or home-related, money, and physical health problems). The adolescents felt <u>least</u> free to go to their fathers for help on 11 of the 12 problems (exception being money). Mothers ranked intermediate between peers and fathers on the majority of the problems.

Enter Table 2 about here

The adolescents were asked to indicate the reasons why they disclosed their problems and tensions to particular helpers. Table 3 presents the list of 11 reasons for disclosing and indicates the number of percentage of adolescents endorsing each of the reasons for each of the three target helpers (mother, father and peer). It should be noted that the list contains both positive and negative motivations for disclosing. Peers had the

highest preference ranking on 9 positive reasons for disclosing, followed by mothers, and then fathers. In summary, these adolescents could give fewer positive reasons for disclosing problems and tensions to their fathers than was true for mothers or peers.

Enter Table 3 about here

Table 4 indicates the reasons endorsed by adolescents for not disclosing problems and tensions to their mothers and fathers. Ten of the 11 items were more frequently endorsed for fathers than for mothers, but the differences were not significant.

The largest differences between mothers and fathers data indicated that the fathers were more frequently seen as disinterested, unresponsive, and unapproachable, and as likely to be embarrassed by the discussion of certain problems. In addition, the adolescents themselves frequently mentioned being more embarrassed about talking over certain problems with fathers than with mothers.

Enter Table 4 about here

The adolescents were asked to indicate from a list of 15 behaviours the typical response they would receive from each of the three helpers when they went to them for help. These data are presented in Table 5.

Peers, more likely than mothers or fathers were seen as responding in the following ways: she/he would listen to what I have to say, really try to understand it from my point of view and try to appreciate my feelings; she/he would show that she/he was interested in my situation that I go on talking about me or my problems; she/he would try to make me feel better by talking me out of

my feelings and reassuring me; and she/he would try to get my mind off my problem or just push the problem aside.

Father's most typical reactions as seen by the adolescents were: he would lecture and try to influence me with facts, counter arguments and logic; he would order, direct or command me to do something; he would criticize me, disagree with me or blame me for my situation.

Thus, fathers ranked lowest on the four responses that peers ranked highest; peers ranked lowest on the three areas that fathers ranked highest; mothers ranked intermediate on these seven items.

According to these adolescents it would be somewhat more typical of mothers than of fathers or peers to react in the following ways: (1) she would tell me how to solve my problem - give me advice or suggestions; (2) she would tell me what I should or ought to do; (3) she would tell me the consequences that would occur if I did or didn't do something; (4) she would say "I told you so" or "this wouldn't have happened if you listened to me"; (5) she would agree with me, no matter what I said.

Enter Table 5 about here

Each of the three helper groups (mothers, fathers and peers) seem to have their own characteristic ways of responding to the adolescent with problems. Peer helpers tend to respond in supportive and empathic ways. They seem able to deal with feelings; they appear interested in the troubled individual and in trying to understand the situation from the adolescent's frame of reference

Peers helpers were also seen as helping to distract the adolescent from the specific problems disturbing him/her).

Fathers responded in ways that diminished and "put down" the adolescent. Their typical helping reactions were heavily "facts" oriented (as opposed to feeling oriented) and smacked strongly of talking down, and acting in controlling and authoritative ways.

Mothers are seen by adolescents as generally talking "at" them. They give advice and suggestions, but also moralize and criticize when the adolescent is having difficulties.

The adolescents were asked to indicate from a list of 16 helpers the three they valued the most (rank ordered). The data is shown in Table 6. Mothers were first and second choices more frequently than fathers (they were about equal on third choice votes). When the peer choices are collapsed, they represent about 60 percent of the first place choices, 55 percent of second place votes and 60 percent of third-choice votes. Thus, in general, adolescent helpers were valued more highly than mothers and fathers combined.

Enter Table 6 about here

We than conducted several analyses to see whether the relatively poorer performance of the fathers as helpers could be the result of differences in demographic characteristics. We considered that father's age, education, and income could potentially be related to their effectiveness as helpers to their children.

Father's education and incomes were significantly related to each other (r = .37) but father's age was unrelated to education or income. To examine the separate effects of these three factors, the sample of adolescents was divided into thirds on each factor. Then the highest and lowest thirds were compared. These comparisons indicated that father's age and father's income did not affect the way the adolescents evaluated their father as a helper. Father's education was found to make a significant difference on only three of the helping items. Adolescents whose fathers fell into the top third on education rated their fathers as more interested, accepting and open, and felt less embarrassment in going to him for help. But when one considers the total numbers of comparisons made, it is safe to conclude that father's age, education and income had little influence on how valuable their children perceived their help to be.

Implications

Before discussing some of the implications of our findings a few words of caution are in order. First, we did not collect data from the "helpers" (fathers, mothers or peers) about the behavior of the helpee. Informal helping, as a social interaction process depends on both helper and helpee. It is quite likely that parents and peers can identify reactions and behaviors on the part of the adolescents that minimize or blunt their attempts to help them. Secondly, we did not collect any data that would indicate which source of helping really makes/or made a difference to the adolescents in the long run. Thus, although at present the adolescents reported a greater willingness to disclose to their peers and more satisfaction with the help received from peers, it might be that in retrospect the father's help will be seen as more valuable.

It is not uncommon for young adults to look back and realize and appreciate (from a point of greater wisdom and maturity) how helpful a particular parent was at an earlier point in his/her life, yet at the time the parent may have been seen as arbitrary, dogmatic, or unsympathetic.

Nevertheless the data are disturbing on two counts. Firstly, fathers as a group often compare unfavourably with mothers and peers in terms of how adolescents perceive their helpfulness. Secondly, although we don't know the long range impact or impression of fathers' help, we know that the quality of fathers' help as seen by adolescents in the present does have an influence on adolescent well being.

Fathers as ineffective helpers

The fathers as a group were better educated than their wives, were older and probably had been exposed to a wider range of life's experiences because of their participation in the work world as well as in the family. One would hope that these qualities would be assets to fathers charged with the responsibility for helping their children through their adolescence. Yet, their adolescents saw them as the least helpful resource of the three groups studied here. What is it that limits the fathers' resource value to their children? Several possibilities suggest themselves. It may be that fathers are busily engaged in activities away from home to such an extent that their children have too little time with them to discuss their problems. By the time they have grown in adolescence they may have learned to discount father as a possible source of help and learned to seek out others. It may also be that after a full day at work fathers may be looking for and needing a place to relax and unwind. They may not feel they have the physical or psychological energy to support others through their trials or tribulations. In addition

to this, fathers literally may not be comfortable in an emotional-support capacity. Our adolescents reported that they did not feel free to go to their fathers with problems involving sex, their emotional health, their own personalities and their friends - all very personal problems. They felt embarrassed talking about these concerns to their fathers and they saw their fathers as embarrassed by them as well. Furthermore, fathers tended to respond in ways that diminished and put down their adolescents. Strong elements of coercion and power were also involved. These are behaviors which generally make most people feel threatened or defensive, whereas what may be needed is understanding and support so that the adolescents can explore ways to deal with their problem feelings or other difficulties.

It is interesting that the behaviors attributed to fathers in their helping relationships with their adolescents are behaviors which are prevalent in most work environments. The work world tends to be characterized by impersonal relationships, and respects power, authority, logic and facts. Thus fathers may be attempting to relate to their adolescents and their personal problems in the same way as they relate to co-workers and handle work problems. The latter set of behaviors in a personal-life context may do little but set up barriers between fathers and their children.

Fathers as effective helpers

The research also showed that adolescents reporting greater satisfaction with fathers' help had better standings on well-being measures. We collected information from all of the adolescents in thirteen different areas of their well-being and happiness. The data indicated that satisfaction with the help provided by one's father was significantly related to 9 of these areas;

the more satisfied the adolescent was with his/her father's help the more satisified and healthy he appeared to be. Thus, more specifically, adolescents who were more satisfied with their father's help were also (1) more satisfied with their life to date, (2) reported better physical health and fewer psychosomatic symptoms, (3) were less likely to have impulses to aggresstion, (4) were less likely to experience anomie or restlessness, (5) reported fewer feelings of general anxiety, (6) reported less resentment, (7) reported fewer feelings of tension, (8) were less irritable, and (9) were more likely to indicate feelings of social support.

Thus, the helping relationship the adolescent enjoyed with his father was a significant factor in the quality of his life. The point then is not whether father's help is relatively more or less effective than the help of mothers or peers. What should be emphasized is the absolute value of fathers effective help to their adolescents. It is significantly related to several important measures of adolescent well-being. Unfortunately, it appears that the father-adolescent helping relationship often remains undeveloped, or at best, evolves haphazardly.

We hope our findings will encourage fathers to take a closer look at their relationships with their adolescents, and in particular, at the specific behaviors they emit in response to their adolescents' needs for help with life's problems. Information, literature and counselling is readily available to help fathers make a smoother transition from the world of work to the world of home and family. Such assistance may be necessary if fathers are to realize their potential for influencing the lives and well-being of their adolescents.

Footnotes

1. This research was supported by a grant from Imperial Oil Limited. We would like to acknowledge the assistance of Denise Harrison in the design of the study, and Randy Montgomery for his help in data analysis. We would also like to thank the administrators and teachers of the three schools who participated, and the young men and women who gave freely of themselves while providing the data.

References

Burke R. J. and Weir, T. The husband-wife relationship: How significant to career and life success? Business Quarterly 1975, 40, 62-67.

Burke, R. J. and Weir, T. Giving and Receiving help with work and non-work related problems. Journal of Business Administration, 1975, 6, 59-78.

Burke, R. J., Weir, T. and Duncan, G. Informal helping processes in work settings. Academy of Management Journal, 1976, in press.

Burke, R. J., and Weir, T. Managers' perceptions of effective, ineffective and non-helpers. Journal of Business Administration, 1976, in press.

Burke, R. J. and Weir, T. Organizational climate and informal helping processes in work settings. Paper presented at the 1976 meeting of the Canadian Association of Administrative Sciences, Quebec City, 1976.

Table 1

Reactions to Mothers, Fathers, and Peers as Helpers*

	Mothers		Fathers		Peers	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Likelihood of disclosing when feeling tense	3.1[ac]	2.8[bd]	3.8[ae]	3.5[bf]	2.4[ce]	2.0[df]
Satisfaction with helping efforts	2.2	2.4	2.4	2.7[g]	2.1	1.8[g]

*Means with similar superscripts are significantly different from each other at the .05 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

Table 2

Freedom to go for Help with Particular Problems*

Type of Problem	Mother N	Mother %	Father N	Father %	Peer N	Peer %
School-related	213	78[a]	178	65[ab]	220	80[b]
Family or home-related	204	74[ac]	147	54[cd]	192	70[d]
Sex-related	75	27[e]	45	16[f]	186	68[ef]
Money	209	76[g]	197	72[h]	126	46[gh]
Physical health	210	77[ij]	123	45[i]	150	55[j]
Emotional health	137	50[k]	77	28[kl]	176	64[l]
Friends	133	48[mn]	81	30[mo]	189	69[no]
Developing my own values, ideas and beliefs	132	48	122	44	155	57
Future goals	181	66	172	63	186	68
Own personality	104	38[p]	80	29[q]	155	57[pq]
Adjusting to adult responsibilities	141	52	118	43	159	58
Differences in my values and beliefs and theirs	148	54	121	44	158	61

* Percentages with similar superscript are significantly different at the .05 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

Table 3

Reason for Disclosing Problems to Particular Helpers

Reasons	Mother N	Mother %	Father N	Father %	Peer N	Peer %
(1) To get it off my chest, an outlet or release	71	26[a]	31	11[ab]	107	39[b]
(2) Generally asks me what's wrong	71	26	47	17[c]	96	35[c]
(3) So understanding why I'm so uptight	80	29	57	21[d]	113	41[d]
(4) Because I want to help, solutions	55	20[e]	44	16[f]	102	37[ef]
(5) Get points of view	68	25[g]	55	20[h]	117	43[gh]
(6) Because I want sympathy, comfort	23	8	12	4	34	12
(7) I wart helper to know he's not the only one with problems	8	3	10	4	12	4
(8) Is interested, understanding, open, easy to talk to	70	26[i]	44	16[j]	122	44[ij]
(9) Accepts what I say without thinking I'm bad or wrong	42	15[k]	28	10[l]	79	29[kl]
(10) I trust helper	68	25[m]	52	19[n]	124	45[mn]
(11) Won't bug me	19	7	15	6	9	3

* Percentages with similar superscripts are significantly different at the .05 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

Table 4

Reasons for Not Disclosing Problems to Particular Helpers

	Mother		Father	
	N	%	N	%
Reasons				
(1) Don't want to bother, worry or upset	21	8	28	10
(2) Couldn't help me with my problem anyway	21	8	31	11
(3) Disinterested, unresponsive, unapproachable	13	5	27	10
(4) Prefer to solve own problem	24	9	35	13
(5) Would not accept what I have to say as valid and would probably think I was wrong to feel this way	17	6	19	7
(6) Doesn't help me solve my own problems, but tries to solve them for me in own way, not mine	15	6	25	9
(7) Does too much lecturing and not enough listening	17	6	25	9
(8) Would embarrass me to talk about some things with him	20	7	37	14
(9) None of his business	6	2	13	5
(10) Would probably feel embarrassed talking with me about some of my problems	6	2	26	10
(11) There is an unspoken rule at home not to talk about your feelings or problems	5	2	4	2

Table 5

Typical Reactions of Various Helpers*

Reactions	Mother N	Mother %	Father N	Father %	Peer N	Peer %
(a) She would order, direct or command me to do something.	30	11	41	15[a]	12	4[a]
(b) She would tell me <u>how</u> to solve my problem; give me advice or suggestions.	205	75	177	65	204	74
(c) She would agree with me, no matter what I said.	22	8	14	5	15	6
(d) She would make me feel foolish, inadequate, ashamed.	30	11	29	11	13	5
(e) She would try to analyze what I'm saying and act like she had me all figured out.	73	27	71	26	67	24
(f) She would tell me what I <u>should</u> or ought to do.	189	69	166	61	173	63
(g) She would criticize me, disagree with me or blame me for my situation.	37	14[b]	40	15[c]	16	6[bc]
(h) She would say "I told you so" or "This wouldn't have happened if you listened to me".	72	26[d]	57	21	26	10[d]
(i) She would tell me the consequences that would occur if I do something or don't do something.	182	66	153	56	157	57
(j) She would lecture and try to influence me with facts, counter arguments and logic.	88	32	103	38[e]	59	22[e]
(k) She would try to make me feel better by talking me out of my feelings, reassuring me, denying the strength of my feelings.	138	50	111	40[f]	166	61[f]
(l) She would question or interrogate me, trying to get more information about my problem.	116	42	94	34	114	42
(m) (She would try to get my mind off my problem or just push the problem aside.	64	23	44	16[g]	79	29[g]
(n) She would show that she was interested in my situation by asking that I go on talking about me and my problems.	167	61	154	56[h]	207	76[h]
(o) She would listen to what I have to say and really try to understand it from my point of view and appreciating my feelings.	184	67	163	60[i]	222	81[i]

* Percentages with similar superscripts are significantly different at the .05 level of confidence, two-tailed test.

Table 6

Three Most Valued Helpers

Reasons	First Choices N	First Choices %	Second Choices N	Second Choices %	Third Choices N	Third Choices %
(1) my father	20	7	43	16	39	14
(2) My steady girlfriend	12	4	4	2	6	2
(3) My steady boyfriend	31	11	15	6	10	4
(4) My mother	81	30	54	20	38	14
(5) A teacher	1	.4	5	2	4	2
(6) A brother	4	2	11	4	15	6
(7) A close male friend at school	11	4	13	5	13	5
(8) A sister	18	7	23	8	23	8
(9) A close female friend at school	43	16	26	10	25	9
(10) An adult neighbor	2	.1	1	.4	3	1
(11) A clergyman	2	1	2	1	4	2
(12) A professional counsellor or therapist	6	2	0	0	2	1
(13) A relative	4	2	5	2	10	4
(14) A close male friend outside of school	7	3	11	4	17	6
(15) A close female friend outside of school	10	4	20	7	21	8
(16) A guidance counsellor at school	1	.4	4	2	5	2